



# Town of Groton, Connecticut

## Meeting Minutes

### Town Council Committee of the Whole

45 Fort Hill Road  
Groton, CT 06340-4394  
Town Clerk 860-441-6640  
Town Manager  
860-441-6630

**Mayor Heather Bond Somers, Councilors Dean G. Antipas, Bruce S. Flax, Bill Johnson, Karen F. Morton, Deborah L. Peruzzotti, Rita M. Schmidt, James L. Streeter, and Harry A. Watson**

**Tuesday, November 12, 2013**

**6:00 PM**

**Town Hall Annex - Community Room 1**

#### **REGULAR MEETING**

#### **1. CALL TO ORDER**

*Mayor Somers called the meeting to order at 6:06 p.m.*

#### **2. ROLL CALL**

Members Present: Mayor Somers, Councilor Antipas, Councilor Flax, Councilor Morton and Councilor Watson

Members Absent: Councilor Johnson, Councilor Peruzzotti, Councilor Schmidt and Councilor Streeter

*Also present were Town Manager Mark Oefinger and Executive Assistant Nicki Bresnahan.*

#### **3. Calendar and Communications**

**2013-0164**

##### **FYE 2014 Budget Follow-up**

##### **Discussed**

- *Fire District PILOT Payments*  
*Poquonnock Bridge Fire District*

*Deb Monteiro, Alan Ackley, Ron Yuhas, Gary Bertman, Peter Legnos, and Chief Todd Paige were present to address the Council. Mayor Somers opened up the discussion for questions.*

*In response to Councilor Flax, it was noted that the district's current budget is \$4.6 million. There are about 30 paid firefighters and no volunteers. The pension is with the Town's pension fund. Poquonnock Bridge is a 12 square mile service area with approximately 2,000 calls per year; 60% are medical calls. No trash pickup is provided in the district.*

*The Fort Hill station is closed except for the Fire Marshal and staff. Equipment consists of two pumpers, a pickup truck, and a reserve pumper. The district owns a ladder truck that has been deemed unsafe. After consolidating forces, the policy is to respond to medical calls with a pickup and one pumper. On a second call, one pumper will respond. The Chief explained that the decision was made to sustain funds through the end of the year. It would not be his first choice given appropriate funding.*

*The PILOT funding (\$154,550) is included in projections for the budget. Mr. Ackley distributed information. Mr. Yuhas stated the pension is fully funded. With respect to OPEB, the district has not made any contributions at all. The mill rated was decreased from 5.9 to 5.2 and the district cannot pay the bills. Health insurance for retirees is also not funded, but is a "pay as you go" system. Mr. Legnos agreed that the system cannot work much longer.*

*Mayor Somers pointed out that the district is not funding in accordance with the approved contract. District representatives did not know how much the new contract, if honored, would cost.*

*In response to Councilor Morton, Mr. Yuhas noted that the district's troubles are not due to a failure to budget properly, but because everything the board tries to stop is a battle and the union*

*will not come back to the table.*

*Councilor Antipas asked about the state of public safety in light of the district's issue covering its obligations. Chief Paige explained that every department relies on everyone else (mutual aid) to fight a fire. If Poquonnock Bridge cannot provide that service, he doesn't know what other districts will do. Poquonnock Bridge has had a strong fire prevention policy (sprinklers, fire alarms) and he doesn't believe other districts could fill that void.*

*Mr. Legnos noted that health insurance costs have gone up exponentially. The district's accountant advised the board to put money aside for retirees rather than doing pay as you go. Taxes in Poquonnock Bridge are significantly higher than other districts and the issues have grown over time. Mr. Ackley stated that taxes will impact any businesses or industries that want to come into the district.*

*Mayor Somers clarified that the district board proposed a \$6.2 million budget. Deb Monteiro (now a board member) offered an amended budget of \$5.2 million, but before the vote, Mr. Ackley proposed \$3.5 million and it was approved. Mayor Somers believes that people did not know what they were voting for.*

*Councilor Antipas asked if any steps have been taken toward creating a volunteer force and Chief Paige replied no and noted it is a very costly undertaking. He suggested it is better to explore other avenues (collaboration) rather than starting a new volunteer force. Mr. Ackley noted that volunteers work very well in other districts and the Poquonnock Bridge Volunteer Fire Company has prevented others from joining. Chief Paige noted that history and culture of the department as well as services play a role in a successful volunteer company.*

*Councilor Flax noted the number of paid versus volunteer firefighters in the various districts. Chief Paige suggested looking at the level of service provided. Poquonnock Bridge has the most calls and the most complex calls (apartments and commercial complexes). Ms. Monteiro noted that the Poquonnock Bridge Fire District includes municipal buildings, schools, commercial, and industrial development in addition to residential development. Chief Paige noted that Poquonnock Bridge also does more hazardous materials calls, rescues, and fire prevention than most districts.*

*Mr. Ackley suggested that duplication of service at medical calls should be addressed and Mayor Somers agreed that the services and districts should sit down collectively to coordinate. Chief Paige explained that the system is designed to provide the quickest response, especially when the ambulance is busy with transport.*

*Mr. Bertman noted that he is attempting to dissect the number of calls in the district, looking at redundancy, and speaking with individuals to determine their needs. He is speaking with Joe Sastre about making changes to tiered services to reduce the number of responses.*

**2013-0263**

**City of Groton Notification of Use of Highway Paving Funds**

**Discussed and Recommended no action taken**

*Tim Umrysz of the City Public Works Department handed out information to the Council including background on a request for CIP funding for paving, actual funding approved, projects completed, and costs. It is the City's intent to redirect remaining funds (\$179,000) to other streets (Bayberry Lane, Meech Avenue, North Prospect Street and Circle Avenue).*

*Councilor Watson thanked Mr. Umrysz for notifying the Council of the City's plan.*

*Mr. Umrysz explained the work done on Spicer Avenue, Church Street, and Bridge Street and expected life expectancy. The Groton Estates project was done with road bond money. Councilor*

*Flax also thanked Mr. Umrysz for coming in to meet with the Council.*

**4. Approval of Minutes**

**2013-0259 Approval of Minutes (Committee of the Whole)**

**RESOLUTION ACCEPTING COMMITTEE OF THE WHOLE MINUTES**

RESOLVED, that the minutes of the Town Council Committee of the Whole meetings of October 8, 2013 and October 22, 2013 are hereby accepted and approved.

**A motion was made by Councilor Antipas, seconded by Councilor Morton, to adopt.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**5. UNFINISHED BUSINESS**

*None.*

**6. NEW BUSINESS**

**2013-0257 Resale of Town-Owned Property**

**Discussed**

*Sal Pandolfo, Cindy Small, and Town Attorney Ray Baribeault were present to discuss the process, not the potential properties for sale. The Town Council approved a policy in 1994. Later, the Town Attorney recommended changes to the policy that were never made. Discussion followed on creating a new policy that will take effect as soon as property is foreclosed on so there will no longer be a backlog.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Antipas, seconded by Councilor Morton, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

**The motion carried unanimously**

**2013-0256 Hazard Mitigation Grant Program - Senior Center Generator**

**Discussed**

*Gary Schneider and Joe Sastre were present to request authorization to apply for a grant to install a second generator at the Senior Center. The total cost is \$500,000 and 75% is grant reimbursable. The \$125,000 local match will be included in the upcoming CIP.*

**A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Morton, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.**

*Discussion followed on the previous request (that was denied) to use bond referendum funds for a generator. Mr. Sastre noted the existing generator is sized for the freezer/refrigerator and heating, and a second generator will provide power to the remainder of building. If there is no power at the Senior Center, it cannot be used as a respite or emergency shelter. A shelter cannot operate at Fitch High School while school is in session and the generators at Fitch do not sufficiently power the building either. There are only a limited number of generator powered outlets which is a concern when there are medical equipment needs. Another problem at Fitch is there is no way to turn the lights off in the main hallway where people are sleeping because they are on motion-detectors. There is no power in the locker area so no showers are available. The Town has used the two facilities back and forth, but could conceivably need them both at the same time. Town Manager Oefinger noted that even after an emergency there is a big push to get the schools open and there may still be a need to shelter people. Or, in a flooding storm, the Senior Center may not be accessible.*

*Mayor Somers agreed that power outlets are important. Councilor Morton noted that residents from Ledyard and North Stonington also shelter in Groton. Their needs include refrigeration for insulin and power for oxygen. Mr. Sastre noted that the Red Cross cannot support shelters in individual towns and has instead identified multi-jurisdictional facilities like Groton.*

Councilor Flax expressed concern that the Senior Center was not designed correctly to be used as a respite center. Power has not been an issue because the building is served by Groton Utilities. Mr. Schneider noted that if the main transmission lines for Groton Utilities are affected, there will be longer outages. Also, the Center has evolved into a different type of structure than when it was designed.

The motion carried unanimously

**2013-0247 Groton Long Point Road Bridge Over Palmer's Cove**

**Discussed**

Mayor Somers noted this item is on the agenda to discuss the presentation by the consultant. Gary Schneider, Director of Public Works, noted that all scenarios must be at least 33' wide to make the project eligible for federal funding.

The Council discussed the options presented by the consultant and the need for a pedestrian walkway. Councilor Antipas noted that there is not much of a shoulder or sidewalk leading up to or after the bridge so a walkway should be incorporated into an overall plan.

Mr. Schneider noted that discussions must take place with Groton Utilities and others about undergrounding utilities and possible contributions. Other outstanding issues are lighting and vertical clearance. Funds will be included in the FYE 2015 CIP to refine the concepts and cost estimates.

Councilor Flax asked if referenda votes can be tiered and suggested that it be looked at for the future. The Town Manager advised that advisory/opinion referenda are prohibited.

After further discussion, the consensus was to support Alternative 2 that includes a 6' pedestrian bridge.

The Council recessed at 8:42 p.m. and returned at 8:49 p.m.

**2009-0166 Townwide Police Assessment**

**Discussed**

The Townwide Police Assessment report was presented on November 7th and it can be viewed on GMTV and on line. With a new Council coming on board the first meeting in December, the Council agreed to wait to discuss this item but did say that they would like to move forward with the information provided.

**2013-0179 Planning and Zoning Issues**

**Discussed**

The Town Manager noted that communications with Sue Sutherland of the Zoning Commission indicated that December 10th is a good date to meet.

**2013-0260 Adoption of 2014 Town Council Regular Meeting Schedule**

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Flax, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 4 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Flax, Councilor Morton and Councilor Watson  
Abstain: 1 - Councilor Antipas

**2013-0261 Adoption of 2014 Town Council Committee of the Whole Regular Meeting Schedule**

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Flax, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 4 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Flax, Councilor Morton and Councilor Watson

Abstain: 1 - Councilor Antipas

**2013-0262 Adoption of 2014 Personnel, Rules, and Appointments Committee Regular Meeting Schedule**

A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Flax, that this matter be Recommended for a Resolution.

The motion carried by the following vote:

**Votes:** In Favor: 4 - Mayor Somers, Councilor Flax, Councilor Morton and Councilor Watson

Abstain: 1 - Councilor Antipas

**7. Consideration of Committee Referral Items as per Town Council Referral List**

*None.*

**8. OTHER BUSINESS**

*None.*

**9. ADJOURNMENT**

*A motion was made by Councilor Watson, seconded by Councilor Antipas, to adjourn the meeting at 8:52 p.m.*

*The motion carried unanimously.*